1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

to seniors, first in the household then in the society at large, that is the most important social learning of childhood. Kanuri society is hierarchical. Whether the person is in one compound or another, one social situation or another, there is always one common feature—rank and its determinants, power and authority. By living in several compounds, by seeing authority at work in the community, and by learning to generalize his response to authority, the young child learns to respond easily and gracefully to many combinations of rank and position. His counterpart in western society may be learning how to cope with the intricacies of modern urban technology, but he would certainly be no match for his Kanuri counterpart in the diplomacy necessary in dealing with superiors.

Puberty

Puberty is not an age-grade in the same sense as childhood or adolesence. Yet it deserves some special attention because it is a marker that separates these two life periods and creates a means for very important transitions especially for young girls. Sometime between the age of twelve and fourteen most girls undergo their first marriage. Boys on the other hand begin their adolescence. This is a more carefree time for them than the period of intense training for adulthood that a girl is suddenly confronted with as she moves from childhood into her teenage period and marriage.

However there are no absolutely sharp breaks even for a girl. A newly married young girl is not considered totally grown-up and sometimes she continues to wear her hair in the childhood style. If she divorces during this early period, usually the first three or four years after her first marriage, people often speak of her as *njim suri* or one who is only beginning to become a woman but who has not completed the change-over to full adultlhood.[1] At first the young wife still sees many unmarried childhood friends who will soon be getting married themselves. They visit her when she is confined to the house for varying periods depending upon how secluded her husband wishes his wife to be. Only gradually over the period of the first year or so of marriage does the young girl begin to participate fully as a wife. From the first she cooks food regularly because it is her duty and her right, and as time goes on she is seen more and more in the company of the older, adult women of the compound and the neighborhood. If she is not in total seclusion, like most rural wives, then she can be seen going with the women to the well or the market, and to women's festivities in the village.

Although rare it sometimes happens that a girl misses the opportunity to marry while still in her early teens. Leaving aside the very few girls who go on in school, such cases are rather tragic. The girl is either mentally deficient or a disturbed person, or one who people say has been having love affairs before marriage. In such cases she changes her hair style in her middle to late teens and takes on the role of a single divorced woman seeking a new husband and therefore open to courtship and sexual liaisons with men.

In Magumeri one young girl about fifteen or sixteen who was well de-

[1] Literally *njim suri* means to have seen inside the hut, that is she has been alone with her husband but only seen or glimpsed at the activities of adulthood not really practiced them in full.

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

882 veloped physically had not yet married. There were many rumors and much gossip
883 to the effect that she was no longer a virgin and that men of the town slept with
581 her. Her father, it was said, would have a hard time arranging her first marriage.
156 The girl herself seemed to be suffering increasingly from her inability to see herself in the role of a child awaiting marriage instead of that of a developing young matron—the role now common among her young age mates. Thus in order to take up a normal position in society, girls are supposed to have their first marriages in and around the time of puberty. Failure to do so indicates a deviant and degrading development. This is the reason why almost all Bornu men say that girls who go on
883 in the educational system are "spoiled" and should never be allowed to stay in
882 school beyond the traditional age of marriage. The girls in school see the matter
871 differently; the situation remains today one of tension, with the majority against
578 education for girls, and the schools themselves looking for students and preaching a somewhat different attitude toward a girl's adolescence than that held traditionally by the people.

882 Another point should also be noted. Most girls have very little choice, if
883 any, in their first marriage arrangements. If they are very drastically opposed to the
584 union, their views are considered since parents are afraid they might behave badly as young wives. However they are traditionally supposed to respect the wishes of their parents and comply with their demands. Indeed many Kanuri, both men and women, know very little about their first marriage arrangements at all since these are almost entirely made by their parents or the head of the compound they are living in at the time. It should also be realized that many Kanuri girls marry for the first time with men sometimes as much as two, three, and even four times their own age which enhances the traditional seniority of the husband as well as taking any "romance" out of it for the girls.

88 Sometime around the end of childhood and into the beginning of the teen-
[304] age period young boys are circumcized. This event is fundamentally a ceremonial occasion and is thus related only in a rough general way to the actual onset of puberty for each boy. Generally speaking boys are cut in groups, although in rural areas it is not uncommon to see a family performing the ceremony for just one boy
[554] in the household. On the other hand circumcision among high-ranking people such as village heads, district heads, members of the royal family, or rich traders in the city attracts many other families who try to have their own children cut at the same time to participate in the large festivities. Usually the higher the rank of the leading families involved in a circumcision the greater the number of boys who are likely to be cut at the same time.

881 The important thing is not the readiness of the boy. Rather it is the auspi-
571 ciousness of the occasion in terms of the family's relationship to the rest of the community. Is there a large circumcision taking place this year? Are a large number of friends and relatives asking when little Abba Gana is going to be circumcized? Have the household members, especially the household head, attended a great many marriage or naming ceremonies? Have other community members been given gifts on these occasions? Is it not time to reap the benefit of all this participation by having a ceremony of one's own to which many people will come and bring gifts of food, clothing, and money for the family and the boy? These and similar questions are the determining factors in the timing of the circumcision ceremony, and

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they point to the major functions of the event. Certainly it marks publicly the opening of the gates on the road to manhood for the young man, but, much more importantly, it validates, strengthens and dramatizes the relational network of ties that the family and the household maintain and attempt to promote in the society.

At some of the larger ceremonies, especially those held by the high-ranking households in Bornu, there is often a small group of recent converts who ask to join the ceremony in order to mark their religious conversion and obtain full membership in Kanuri society. In one very large circumcision we saw forty-seven boys from high status households and ten Cameroon pagans ranging in age from fifteen to thirty-five. These latter seemed completely ecstatic to have been accepted at the ceremony and were the subject of much ribald joking by the Kanuri participants. However they now had an easier access to Kanuri women as wives and sweethearts, and it is conceivable that when they do in fact marry Kanuri women they and their descendants will eventually be absorbed into Kanuri society. Thus the circumcision ceremony is one of the important gateways into society for non-Moslems from the small tribes surrounding Bornu on its southern and southeastern borders.

As in many cultures around the world, the Kanuri themselves regard the circumcision ceremony as a mark of approaching manhood, and even though the boys are often quite young the ceremony still dramatizes their adult or approaching adult status. Thus after the boys have come out of confinement during which the cut heals, they are given whips which they brandish while chasing and threatening the young girls. The girls must "buy off" such treatment by giving the young boy a few pennies. This ritual was left unexplained by informants who answered questions about its meaning by saying, "We do this because it is our custom." However, it seems likely that it is a symbolic reference to the achievement of manhood or potential manhood. It symbolizes through ritual the cultural value of male dominance which the boys must now begin to practice as they prepare to join the ranks of adult men. The "buying off" of the beating by the little girls can be interpreted to reflect the flexibility of female submissiveness; a woman must behave submissively towards a man but she has levers to gain her own rights and wishes in her relationships with men.

Adolescence

As we have seen, there is an extra age-grade period for boys which lasts from around the time of circumcision to their first marriage between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. At first the young man is still thought of as a small boy, but as he advances into middle and late teenage years he becomes more of a *zairo*—that is to say, a young bachelor. He associates in his free time with other young men his age and begins to gossip about trade, politics, and nocturnal adventures with women. Young boys generally obtain their first sexual experience in their mid to late teenage period from divorced women who are often older than themselves. In their later teens and early twenties they begin to have more serious love affairs of longer duration with young divorced women who may turn out to be their future wives if their first marriages are not already arranged by their parents.

Sitting and listening to a group of these young men discussing matters of

582 In almost half the cases of cousin marriages recorded they are first marriages for the man. On the other hand it is quite rare, female speaking, for cousin marriage to be anything but a first marriage. 582 This is due to the usual method of inception in which the girl is pro- 584 mised as a small child to the boy at his circumcision. If the young girl [304] is given to the boy and comes to live with him in his compound then he is more in the position of guardian to her, or adoptive father, and marriage does not result. If the girl remains in her own compound, or in others, the boy may marry her. In either case he has the primary rights of marriage dispensation over her from that time on. One informant described his own experience with the girl he was just about to marry in the following terms:

582 584 304 881 When I was kaja (circumcised) the girl was given to me; she was only eighteen or nineteen months old at that time; she had been weaned about one month. When I was kaja, they gave me a spear, a watch, a ring, a sword, many robes, and a fine hat (the informant is the eldest son of a well established Village Head). Then my abagana (Fa-Yo-Bro) came and said, "Stand up". We were thirty-five kaja boys at that time, all clothed and taken care of by my father; my father has many chu'una (namesakes). (The informant means here that his father had given each of the boys a robe, he also means that some of the thirty-five boys were being totally supported by his father). My father's mother sat very close to me; she raised me as a child. She said, "Do not stand up for your abagana (Fa-Yo-Bro) unless he gives you his girl." All my family and friends came and brought many gifts. Then my abagana came and put two pounds into my pocket, and said, "Stand up", and I said to him, "No you must finish our custom." After a while he said to me, "I give my girl Palmatta to you". Then my father's mother said, "We agree with you, and she is now our girl."

Today this custom can be practised any time after the circumcision by mutual agreement of the parties involved, although traditionally it is supposed to be carried out at the circumcision.

587 In the one case observed of a non-virgin cousin marriage the 567 [593] informant was a slave of very low status who had married a divorced woman who was his Mo-Bro-Da (she was not a slave). The woman was extremely

567 There are no rules governing sexual intercourse with 130.
595 concubines as there
[833] are with wives. A man may sleep with his concubine any time he wishes
[841] or avoid her as much as he pleases, whereas it is mandatory that he spend alternate nights with wives even if one is menstruating. Conflicts may arise between wives and concubines if the latter is overly
567 favoured sexually by the husband. A more serious cleavage arises in
595 the circumstances of the wife's being barren and a concubine having
593 given birth to a son and heir to her master. It is known by all that
428 one day the son will succeed to a large portion of his father's wealth plus his position as household head. In such a case the boy's slave mother knows that eventually she is to become the respected senior
[184] woman of the compound in which she is now a menial. Although one case was observed, it must be emphasized that such instances are rare in
554 the contemporary society. Only political leaders from the level of
567 town head up, and hereditary nobles were observed to keep concubines.
595 An extremely wealthy trader, who felt very proud of his four wives in
178 seclusion, answered that it would be improper of him to have a concubine because he was only a trader. Seventy-five years ago a man of his position would have had a score of them.

567 Several upper class informants spoke of the traditional prac-
595 tice of giving young concubines to upper class boys at their circum-
• 281 cision, so that they might have a female of their own in order to learn
178 about sexual intercourse. Because of the waning of the slave population numerically this practice seems to be dying out, (only one case of a male who had been raised in this way of the younger, 20 to 30 years ago, generation was recorded).

595 When a man marries a second, third, or fourth wife it is customary for him to give a sum equal to approximately half the luwal-

794 793 mitted to as a superior whose authority is unquestioned. In other cases, mallams near at hand or in the compound take up the job and the (871) child is not forced to leave home. Today there is the added possibility of receiving religious instruction in the government schools. However, this is still rare in rural areas.

591 By the age of ten or twelve years, a young Kanuri boy may have lived in quite a number of households. One informant related how he was adopted by his grandfather at weaning, given to a wandering mallam at the age of six, entered Junior Primary School as a boarder at nine, and entered the service of a District Head at the age of thirteen. This is not an extreme case, especially when the high rate of divorce is considered. Thus a young boy or girl, especially the former, can find himself in one to five or more different households or primary 591 group settings by the time he has reached early adolescence. It may 571 be proper here to ask who is the authority figure in the young child's life; who is it that in his person embodies or symbolizes authority? And the answer is of fundamental importance —— no one. The Kanuri child learns, whether he lives in one compound or many, that his society is a system of ranked hierarchies in which there are many people to whom he must give respect and subordination.

Puberty

561 By the end of childhood, as the Kanuri define it (which means somewhere between the ages of nine to thirteen), the sex roles and many of their accompanying behaviours have been established. From this period onward the development towards adult status is sharply dif- 581 ferentiated for males and females. Somewhere around puberty a young 582 girl is given in virgin marriage by her father or the person who has been designated as having the power of marriage dispensation over her. Male

881 582 informants feel that it is better if a girl is married before she menstruates and claim that religion prescribes this as the best kind of first marriage for a girl. Exceptions are, of course, quite common and not regarded as very bad as long as the girl is a "virgin" (i.e. 585 proven so on her wedding night). When she marries for the first time [302] a girl does not automatically change her status. She is still considered a fero gana (a small girl) just as she was before marriage, and for some little time continues to wear her hair in the young girl style. As one informant put it:

[833] 881 [885] She knows nothing, she copulates yes, but takes no interest in such things, there is no pleasure in it for her. When she bleeds, then she is k-nu kura (a mature woman) and she knows everything and will take pleasure from sexual intercourse. When the first blood comes the girl will feel shame and tell no one, only her close friends, who will tell her mother. Her mother will come and gather together her friends and relatives (female) and cook food and give sada'a (offerings to the poor).

885 [302] Sometime after the onset of menstruation the young girl changes her hair style to the typical and distinctive styling of the adult Kanuri woman. It is not necessary for her to become a completely different person immediately upon taking up the status of married woman. Indeed, she still retains many of her childhood friends. In a completely new locale she first obtains age-mate friends who are, as often as not, pre-pubertal children.

Over the first one or two years of marriage, young brides are more and more to be seen with the other adult women of the compound and the neighbourhood whose main activities and interests centre around marketing, cooking, obtaining water, gossiping and engaging in women's festivities. Less and less are they interested in playing and chatting with the young pre-pubertal children, whose activities become progressively remote from their own.

885 582 871 of any institutional prolongation of a girl's unmarried status beyond puberty is regarded by the people as leading to the ruin of her normal development as it is conceived in the culture. (This opposition is also exacerbated by the fear of a loss of power of dispensation over the girl by her guardian when she attends school).

881 304 For young boys the end of childhood and the beginning of adolescence is marked by circumcision. It is apparent from the variation in age, running anywhere from seven to twelve years for the circumcision of boys, that physiological maturation has very little to do with the timing of the ceremony for any particular boy. The boy's family, especially the head of the household (usually his father), decides the issue on the basis of family readiness to perform the ceremony. Often a large group of boys, sometimes as many as thirty or forty in large towns, are cut when a leading family performs a circumcision for one of its members.

The important thing for the Kanuri is not the readiness of any particular young boy for the ceremony in terms of either his behavioural or physiological development. The deciding factor is the auspiciousness of the occasion in terms of the family's relationships with the rest of the community. Is there a large circumcision taking place this year? Have a lot of friends and relatives been asking repeatedly when little Aba is going to be circumcised? Have the household members, especially the head, attended a great many marriages, naming ceremonies, etc., of other community members and given gifts on these occasions? Is it now time to reap the benefit of all that participation by having a ceremony of one's own, to which many people will come and many gifts of goods and money will be obtained? These

and questions like these are the determining factors in the timing of a circumcision ceremony and they point to the major functions of the event. Certainly it marks publicly the opening of the gates on the roadway to manhood for the young boy, but, much more importantly, it validates, strengthens and dramatizes the relational network of ties that the family and the household maintain and attempt to promote in the society.

As would be expected in a stratified society there is much variation in the elaborateness of the circumcision ceremony, depending upon the rank of the family involved, the number of boys being circumcised together, and the upward mobility motivations of the family head. Generally speaking, the period of circumcision is fifteen days. In the traditional ceremonies the boys are cut at a first and smaller celebration and then remain in their compounds for fifteen days, after which a large ceremony is held.

"They must eat good food and rest until their wound heals," said one informant. The consensus of opinion seems to be that it is "better" to have a group of boys circumcised together rather than singly. This may include several boys from one large extended family. More often the ceremony is initiated by a person of higher rank, such as a hamlet head, a Village Head, a District Head, or some person of noble family. People of lesser rank who have some subordinate relationship then try, or are asked, to have their own sons included. Social distances between the families concerned are, however, not exceptionally great. Thus a peasant's son might conceivably have been circumcised with a hamlet head's son or perhaps even a Village Head's son but it would be most unlikely that he would reach much higher in

881 his connections. The limitations on such social incongruities are
304 twofold. First of all, it would be considered undecorous in the eyes of the community and the person labelled as ro kura (literally: big life, i.e. "pushy" or overly ambitious). Secondly, the elaborateness and therefore the expenses involved increase enormously up through the status hierarchy of the society so that, unless the person has a great deal more wealth than his social position generally implies, he must of necessity carry on the ceremony only with the ranks immediately above or below himself in the social structure.

Exceptions are quite common to both group circumcision and to the two ceremonies held first on the day of the cutting and secondly fifteen days later. Impecunious peasants often prefer a single public ceremony on the day of the cutting. Informants explained that by restricting the ceremony in this fashion they were trying to control the expense.

Adolescence

882 The period after circumcision until marriage is a culturally recognized status for boys. It lasts from about the age of seven to twelve up to the period of eighteen to twenty-two years. For both males and females there is a blurred period between childhood and the next stage of life which in both cases ends roughly at puberty. However, for girls this commonly occurs after their first marriage, while for the boys it does not.

After circumcision the boy can be socially regarded as zairo (literally: attractive in a male sense). However, informants explain that he is still tada gana (a small boy) until he is capable of ejaculation, or until the growth of his pubic hair. The term tada gana is retained and applied to the adolescent to describe his immaturity or